

2002 Annual Report of the District of Nebraska Branch to the Historical Society of the United States Courts in the Eighth Circuit

The District of Nebraska Branch of the Historical Society of the United States Courts in the Eighth Circuit held its annual meeting during the Nebraska State Bar Association on October 17, 2001 in the chambers of Chief United States District Judge Richard G. Kopf. The following branch officers were elected by voice vote to one-year terms:

President
Vice President
Secretary
Treasurer

Mary Hewitt Jones
Hon. Timothy J. Mahoney
Catherine L. Stegman
Frank J. Mihulka

The Branch History Project

Dr. John Wunder, official historian for the District of Nebraska, has written through Chapter 4 of the work commissioned by the Nebraska Branch. Dr. Wunder anticipates great interest in this work from the University of Nebraska press, and our arrangement with him permits him to market the work in exchange for a portion of the proceeds. However, the initial costs of publication will be the responsibility of the Branch. Upon completion of the work, the Branch expects to have "signing parties" in various locations across the state. Dr. Wunder has not fixed a completion date, but he has asked us not to pay him any additional funds due him under his contract until he has finished the project.

The History Prize

On March 27, 2002 the Nebraska Branch announced the Judge Robert Van Pelt History Prize. Announcement of the prize was sent to the history department chairs of Nebraska colleges and universities, as well as the deans of the two law schools in the state. Nineteen announcements were sent in all. The essay must be on a topic of historical significance which is of interest to lawyers, rather than the history of a legal issue or the historical development of a doctrine. We are hoping to work out an arrangement with the Nebraska Quarterly, the journal of the Nebraska State Historical Society, for publication of the winning paper. The first batch of papers is due December 23, 2002. The prize for the winning paper is \$500.00.

Videotaped Interviews with Judges

Chief Bankruptcy Judge Timothy J. Mahoney, Vice President of the Nebraska Branch, has agreed to oversee a project which involves videotaped interviews with Nebraska Federal Judges who have recently retired or taken senior status. For \$500.00 per interview, Professor Richard Shugrue of the



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Creighton Law School, is willing to interview Judges Strom and Cambridge. Professor Shugrue has performed this service in the past for both the Nebraska Branch and the Bar Association utilizing the television production facilities at Creighton. The Branch has identified an historian in Lincoln who served on the ABA's Judicial Selection Committee for many years who is willing to interview the Lincoln judges at no cost to us. And, the Branch has identified a videographer in Lincoln who enjoys sharing his talent with non-profit groups. The interviews of the Lincoln judges will begin in the fall of 2002. The interviews with Judges Cambridge and Strom will be scheduled through Dr. Shugrue. Needless to say, fundraising efforts continue.

Archives Project

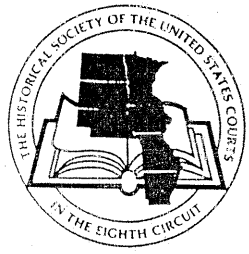
For many years, the Nebraska Branch has maintained control over the papers, files and other memorabilia of Judge Richard Robinson, who served as a District Judge from 1956 through 1991. In late April 2002, Chief United States District Judge Richard Kopf initiated a meeting with archivists at the Nebraska State Historical Society to ascertain whether the Historical Society has any interest in the Robinson papers. The Nebraska State Historical Society expressed great interest in the Robinson papers and agreed to transport the collection to its archives on May 20, 2002. Since Dr. Wunder has found primary sources so helpful in preparing his history of the Branch, the Branch thought it a shame to deny other researchers and historians access to these materials.

During the meeting with the Historical Society, the archivists indicated that the work organizing the Robinson collection would be prioritized if a stipend came along with it. Accordingly, the Branch made a \$500.00 grant to fund the work of a Museum Studies student to begin the organizing and culling process. The Historical Society has encouraged the Branch to make this grant continuing, and of course, it is our hope to be able to do so.

The Nebraska Historical Society has also agreed to be helpful in the Branch's efforts in encouraging retired judges to consider donation of their personal papers. In addition, to help from the Nebraska Historical Society, federal judges taking senior status are given a copy of the Branch's "Resolution for Preservation of Historically Significant Materials." At this time, the Branch is unaware of efforts by any of the recently retired or senior judges to preserve their papers, although this is an issue we address at each annual meeting in October. It may simply be a matter of reminding the judges from time to time of the Branch's hope that they will grant us access to their papers.

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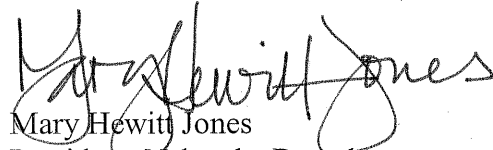


Ongoing Challenges

Maintaining interest in membership remains a challenge. When we began the written history project, interest in the Branch was very high. That interest has declined in recent years although we expect to reinvigorate old members with invitations to the signing parties upon the completion of Dr. Wunder's work. The challenge then becomes, what next? We believe the Robert Van Pelt History Prize may go a ways toward answering that question.

Thank you for this opportunity to update you on the activities of the Nebraska Branch.

Respectfully submitted,


Mary Hewitt Jones
President, Nebraska Branch